

CCM 2013 Testimony

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Your source for local government management information www.ccm-ct.org

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

February 1, 2013

Good Morning.

My name is Ryan Bingham. I am Mayor of Torrington and President of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government -- your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 92% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to testify before this joint committee on the issue of mandates reform, a top priority of CCM's.

CCM supports the bills below, but urges the Committee to support meaningful relief from existing mandates THIS YEAR.

H.B. 5097, 5099, 5101, 5172, 5341, 5273, 5274, 5439, 5528, 5529, and SB 223 would enact a statutory prohibition to against the passage of *new* unfunded state mandates without a 2/3 vote of both chambers of the General Assembly.

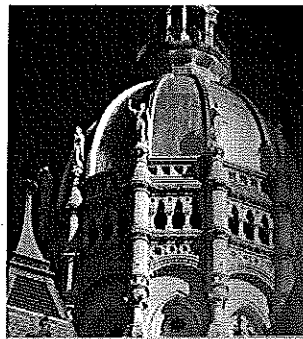
Local government supports the objective of many mandates -- but opposes the State's failure to pay for them.

~~At a time when towns and cities are struggling mightily to continue to provide needed services to residents and businesses, immediate – not only future – mandates relief should be a priority.~~

CCM recognizes that the General Assembly has a growing reluctance to impose or expand unfunded mandates. This Committee, in particular, has been sensitive to this issue.

However, modest proposals to update prevailing wage thresholds, which have not been raised in 20 years, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the municipal binding arbitration mandate continue to be blocked due to special interest pressure.

Considering that municipalities are in a deep fiscal crisis not seen in generations, towns and cities need mandates relief *THIS YEAR.*



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Support Mandates Relief THIS YEAR

To provide meaningful mandates reform during the most challenging fiscal crisis since the Great Depression, CCM urges the Committee to be bold and support the following reforms:

- **Amend the State's prevailing wage rate mandate [CGS 31-53(g)]:** (a) adjust the thresholds for renovation construction projects, from \$100,000 to \$400,000; (b) adjust the thresholds for new construction projects, from \$400,000 to \$1 million. The current thresholds have not been raised since 1991.
 - **Modestly modify state-mandated compulsory binding arbitration laws** under the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA) and the Teacher Negotiation Act (TNA) by (a) requiring that all neutral municipal arbitrators be members of the American Arbitration Association, and (b) preventing an arbitration panel from considering a municipal reserve fund balance when determining municipalities' financial capability.
 - **Eliminate the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)** that prevents municipalities from finding savings and efficiencies in board of education budgets. At the very least, the **MBR should be eliminated** for FYs 14-15 to allow municipalities to find reasonable savings for their property taxpayers, **or at the very least provide for reductions if certain cost savings or efficiencies can be achieved**. CCM supports ensuring that state education aid is spent on education - *every community in Connecticut already spends more on K-12 public education than they receive from the State*.
 - **CCM supports HB 5530 and 5532, which would allow towns and cities to post legal and other notices on their websites, rather than in newspapers.** This is a costly – and unnecessary – unfunded state mandate.
- CCM discusses these proposals further in separate testimony submitted to the Committee.
- **Allow municipalities that are scheduled to conduct a property revaluation – particularly physical - in 2013 and 2014, the option to delay that revaluation for at least one year, as a reasonable response to the uncertainties of the current market.**
 - **Clarify the statutory definition of "department head" for purposes of excluding such personnel from collective bargaining.**
 - **Repeal the statute that requires one union for the uniformed employees of municipal police departments and municipal fire departments.** Present law requires rank and file employees and supervisors to be in the same union – which has a chilling effect on management authority.

Municipalities recognize that it is neither practical nor desirable to eliminate all unfunded or inadequately funded state mandates, but relief is long overdue. Reform to state mandates is a logical approach to offset depleting state revenues and a growing state deficit.



If you have any questions, please contact Jim Finley (jfinley@ccm-ct.org) or Ron Thomas (rthomas@ccm-ct.org) at (203) 498-3000.